

# TIME EXPLORERS

# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

Teacher's Toolkit



Historic Royal Palaces  
Tower of London



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

Time Explorers has been created for schools by Historic Royal Palaces to inspire learning about history, both at our palaces and in the classroom. Combining immersive storytelling with digital technology and hands-on workshops, we offer learning experiences that enthuse children, nurture imagination and develop skills of historical enquiry, problem-solving and teamwork.

Digital missions are interactive story adventures designed to encourage your pupils to explore the rich and dramatic histories of our palaces.

This Teacher's Toolkit has been produced to support you and your pupils to successfully complete 'The Prisoner's Perilous Plot' mission. It is designed to be a flexible resource for teachers of pupils aged 7-11 years old and has been mapped to the aims of the new National Curriculum.

This toolkit provides you with ideas and resources to extend your pupils' learning before and after their visit. We hope it acts as a useful stimulus and support to help ignite your pupils' passion for learning about history.

## *Your mission...*

*It is 1611, and Arbella Seymour desperately needs your help. Her husband William is imprisoned in the Tower of London. Arbella is determined to help him escape - but she's under house arrest herself, so she needs the Time Explorers to help sneak William out of the Tower to freedom!*

*In order for the plot to work, Arbella and the Time Explorers must gather information about other prisoners and possible routes out of the Tower, so they can make a foolproof plan for escape.*



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Classroom challenges

### Classroom challenges

This toolkit provides a series of classroom challenges for key subject areas.

Challenges can be completed either before or after the main mission activity. All challenges encourage the development of pupils' historical enquiry skills and historical interpretation skills. They also provide useful activity ideas to assess prior pupil knowledge and to consolidate their learning.

Teacher expertise is a key factor in successfully delivering the mission experience, and we recognise the skills of teachers in tailoring the activities to suit their pupils' developmental age and ability.

### Overarching mission learning objectives

- To understand the Tower's role as a prison, and the kind of prisoners that were kept there
- To examine the features of the Tower that made it a good prison
- To gather clues, and use information given, to devise a plan to help a prisoner escape



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Challenge 1: History

### Aim

To illustrate the kind of prisoners kept in the Tower of London in the 1600s and for much of its history.

### Curriculum links

A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066

### Resources

List of prisoners committed to the Tower, 1608-1611 (See end of doc)

### Activity 1

#### Independent work and class discussion

Pupils study the activity sheet and use colour-coding to mark those they think belong together in the same groups: the high and mighty (titled people), commoners, male and female.

Discuss the results.

- Are there any names they recognise such as William Seymour and Lady Arbella Stuart?
- How did they group all the Ladies, Sirs, Dukes and Earls?
- What of the names that do not have titles?  
Do they all belong together?  
What about monks and priests?  
Which groups did they put these into?

Explain that, compared to ordinary people (known as commoners), monks and priests were highly educated. They may also have held different beliefs; Catholic or Protestant.

- What can they conclude about the type of prisoners held in the Tower?

Draw out the idea that the Tower of London was a prison for the high and mighty of the land, or traitors who were thought to be a real danger to the king, as well as some ordinary people caught up in the law. From the information we have it seems that most prisoners in the Tower, whether 'high' or 'low' born, were those suspected of the most serious of crimes.

Point out that, although in 1608-1611 there were more commoners than titled people in the Tower, there would be many more commoners in other prisons than titled (high born or 'important') people. If titled people committed a crime or upset the king they might expect to be sent to the Tower of London - a fearful place for the high and low of the land!



## Activity 2

### Active reinforcement

This fast-paced activity works well in a large cleared space such as the hall or playground. If space is limited you could replace moving from side to side with turning and pointing.

Declare one side of the space as representing 'Yes' and the opposite side as 'No'. The centre of the space represents 'Don't Know'. Ask the following questions: pupils should respond by moving quickly to the correct side, returning to the centre of the space after each question.

- In 1608-1611 were there more titled people imprisoned in the Tower or more commoners?
- Do you think it was an easy prison to escape from?
- Which of these crimes would you be likely to imprisoned in the Tower for committing?

Call one at a time with a quick return to the centre, keeping it fast paced:

- Plotting against the king
- Practising a banned religion
- Stealing a button
- Denying the existence of God
- Calling the king a silly fool
- Calling your neighbour a silly fool
- Preaching a sermon against the king
- Stealing a sheep
- Supporting Lady Arbella's claim to the throne

## Activity 3

### Class discussion

Ask pupils what they think life would have been like for prisoners in the Tower.

Value all responses then ask them to listen as you read the following:

*For some prisoners, locked up in cold and damp cells, daily life could be terrible and became unbearable if they were tortured. For others life was much freer and more pleasant. Some had comfortable rooms with fires for warmth, books and writing materials. Others were free to walk around the grounds. Some even had permission to leave the Tower during the day, returning to their cells or rooms at night. All prisoners had to pay for their board and lodging (food and room), so wealthy prisoners could afford better living conditions. Who got the best rooms? It depended on what a prisoner was accused of, whether they could be trusted and whether the court or the king had imposed special conditions.*

Pupils can then write a short paragraph to answer the following question;

*“What kinds of people were imprisoned in the Tower of London in the 1600s, and what were their living conditions like?”*



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Challenge 2: Maths

### Aim

To interpret data about prisoners in the Tower from 1608-1611

### Curriculum links

Pupils should be taught:

- to interpret and present data using bar charts, pictograms and tables
- recognise the per cent symbol (%) and understand that per cent relates to 'number of parts per hundred', and write percentages as a fraction with denominator 100, and as a decimal

### Resources

Change to Factsheet: prisoners committed to the Tower, 1608-1611 (see end of doc)

### Activity 1

#### Pupils to count the total number of prisoners recorded on the factsheet

They should identify the number that can be classed as commoners and the number who they consider to be titled. Some discussion will be required as to who should be considered in each category (See History activity).

They can then produce a bar chart showing the following:

- All commoners
- All titled prisoners

In the same bar they can use colour coding to differentiate between male and female in each category.

Their chart should include a key.

### Activity 2

#### Students to work out the percentages of:

- Commoners
- Titled people
- Total males
- Total females
- Titled males
- Titled females



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Challenge 3: Geography

### Aim

To demonstrate and reinforce how the Tower of London fits into its environment and why it is well placed as a fortress and a prison.

### Curriculum links

Describe and understand key aspects of human geography, including types of settlement and land use

### Resources

- View of the Tower from the south, c. 1700 (see end of doc)
- A contemporary map of London showing the Tower (see end of doc)

### Activity 1

#### Group work and discussion

Explain that the Tower of London was originally built after the Norman invasion of 1066, as a fortress to house soldiers and defend London. However, right from its completion in 1100, it was also used to hold prisoners. The Tower buildings grew over time, with the famous White Tower replacing the original wooden buildings and the moat and other defences added.

Split the class into two halves for research using the images of the Tower. One half should examine the Tower as a fortress, the other half consider its strengths as a prison.

The fortress group should consider and make notes about what made the Tower a good fortress, considering its location and design.

#### Key points to consider include:

- Why is it placed where it is? (good transport links with roads and river, enemies can be seen crossing the river or fields)
- The top storey (floor) of the White Tower is built to look higher from the outside than it is on the inside; why would this be? (more intimidating and frightening)
- Why does it have inner and outer walls? (harder to breach, easier to defend)
- Why does it have a moat? (difficult and slow for enemies to cross)

The prison group should make notes about why the Tower made a good prison, thinking about how it looked, where it could be seen from and how its location helped to keep the prisoners inside.



Key points to consider include:

- What do you think about its appearance? (it looks intimidating and powerful so you wouldn't want to go there)
- Why is it placed where it is? (protected by the river so harder to escape from on that side and a barrier to escapees)
- Why does it have a moat? (escapees would have to cross it)
- What is the advantage of being near open fields? (little 'cover' for escapees)

Discuss the findings. Does the location of a good fortress automatically make a good site for a prison?

## Activity 2

### Small group role-play

Pupils should imagine that they are the Tower authorities and have been called before the king to explain why they think the Tower is a good prison/fortress in a good location.

Groups prepare their presentations with each member taking key points, and then present them to the king (teacher in role), who questions them closely.





# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Challenge 4: Art and Design

### Aim

To create a simple 'graffito', drawing inspiration from prisoners' graffiti in the Tower of London and reflecting the story of William and Arbella.

### Curriculum links

- To improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing, painting and sculpture with a range of materials
- To learn about great artists, architects and designers in history.

### Resources

- Images of Tower inscriptions (see end of doc)
- Drawing/carving media: either stone coloured cartridge paper with pencil, charcoal or wax crayon; or a clay tablet and stylus.

Discuss the terms 'graffiti' and 'graffito'. You could set this as a research task. The important point to get across is that although today we mostly think of it as sprayed words and designs in public places, it can also be messages and images left by people in the past and that many graffito can be found in old prisons. Prisoners had time on their hands and lots to think about as they awaited trial, execution or other punishment, and they often wanted to 'leave their mark'.

### Examples

Share the example images from the Tower of London. Stress the following points:

- Graffito was produced by people with many hours of boring and sometimes frightening imprisonment
- Sometimes, stonemasons were employed by wealthy prisoners to create a wall memorial on their behalf
- They ranged from simple scratched words to elaborate carved designs
- The designs are like line drawings, with no shading and no colour
- Their message remains long after their death for future generations to interpret



## Activity 1

**Pupils create their own graffito in pencil, charcoal or black wax; better still they can be carved into a clay tablet using a stylus.**

The task is to create a graffito as if from William Seymour in the Tower. It should feature a graphic design, not just words, and can reflect:

- How he feels as a prisoner in the Tower
- His marriage to Arbella
- Their escape plans

If illustrating an escape, the graffito should not give anything away so needs to look like something innocent. Examples: a rope ladder that looks like an innocent border design, the letters of the word 'escape' hidden in the design or the word 'Lee' (in Kent where they planned to meet), or a cheeky wave goodbye to the Tower!



# The Prisoner's Perilous Plot

## Challenge 5: English

### Aim

To plan an escape using a whispered conversation presenting ideas, risks and plans clearly and succinctly.

### Curriculum links

- Ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge
- Articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions
- Use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas

### Activity 1

#### Paired work - enactment

In pairs, children should choose whether to play the role of a Tower prisoner in the 1600s or a friend who is helping them plan an escape. They should use their knowledge of the Tower to discuss possible escape ideas. The conversation should cover the following points:

- Are you prepared to risk an escape?
- What will happen if you don't try to escape?
- What will happen if you are caught?
- What ideas do you have for how to escape?
- What will we need to make it work (disguises, rope, a lantern?)
- How can we fool the guards?
- When shall we escape?
- Have we thought of everything that could go wrong?

The teacher should set a time limit for the discussions, say five minutes, and patrol the room as a guard. When she gets close to any pair they should change the subject to a completely innocent conversation. If time allows, pupils can swap roles and re-run the activity.

### Extension: Independently or in pairs

Pupils to produce a labelled diagram of their escape plan, showing the route they will take, their method in the form of a timeline, and any props/equipment they will need. These can form a display called 'Escape from the Tower'.



## Activity 2

### Class discussion

- How easy was it to plan how easy was it to plan an escape?
- Share some of the plans; how effective do we think they will be and what could go wrong?
- Can you think of ways to improve your plan?

### Extension activity: Independent writing

Pupils to write their own well thought-out escape plan in a clear, step-by-step manner under the following headings:

- Date and time
- Equipment needed
- Step by step method



## List of prisoners committed to the Tower, 1609-1611

YEAR	PRISONER'S NAME	REASON FOR IMPRISONMENT	OUTCOME
1608	Father Paterson (Priest)	Unknown - possibly religious reasons	Unknown - possibly religious reasons
1609	Sir Niall Garv O'Donnell	Involvement in a rebellion in 1608	Died a prisoner and buried at the Tower
1609	Naughton or Necton O'Donnell	Son of above; involvement in the same rebellion	Probably died a prisoner
1609	Sir Donnell O'Cahan or O'Kane	Involvement in a rebellion in 1608	Believed to have died a prisoner in 1617
1609	Unnamed Jesuit (Priest)	Unknown - possibly religious reasons	unknown
1610	William Seymour, 1st Marquis and 11th Earl of Hertford also 11th Duke of Somerset	Accused of marrying Arbella Stuart without the King's permission	Escaped in 1611
1610	William Baldwin	Accused of involvement in Gunpowder Plot	Released in 1618
1610	John Roberts (Monk)	Caught saying illegal Roman Catholic Mass	Hanged, drawn and quartered
1610	Thomas Somers (Priest)	Caught with John Roberts	Hanged, drawn and quartered
1611	Sir Thomas Bartlett	Arrested for using bad language	Released in 1614
1611	Jean Saladin (Male, French)	Suspected of involvement in William Seymour's escape	Unknown
1611	Thomas Batten	Suspected of involvement in Seymour's escape	Unknown
1611	Edward Rodney	Suspected of involvement in William Seymour's escape	Unknown
1611	Lady Arbella (also known as Arabella) Stuart	Escaped from house arrest in Lambeth and recaptured en route to Calais	Died a prisoner in 1615
1611	Mary Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury	Imprisoned with Lady Arbella	Released in 1615
1611	Sir Hugh Compton	Helped Lady Arbella in her escape bid	Fate uncertain but was imprisoned again in 1614
1611	William Markham	Helped Lady Arbella in her escape bid	Eventually released

Adapted from The Tower of London Prisoner Book by Brian A. Harrison





View of the Tower from the south, c. 1700  
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Image of graffiti in the Beauchamp  
Tower ©Historic Royal Palaces





Image of graffiti in the Beauchamp Tower ©Historic Royal Palaces

